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Origin of Breuckelen

By

Harrington Putnam



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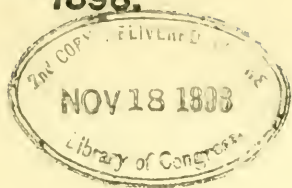
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VOLUME II. NUMBER XI.

BREUCKELEN.

By HARRINGTON PUTNAM.

THE original settlements which came to be known as Breuckelen were but a small part of the present Borough of Brooklyn. The forested river-front of Long Island, rising over against New Amsterdam, was still covered with rich and abundant timber long after a considerable village was planted on the lower part of Manhattan Island. The Holland and Belgium folk, reared in the level and treeless lowlands, were by no means eager to undertake the severe and unaccustomed labor of forest-clearing.¹ On Long Island they seem to have been first drawn to the flats having a light surface soil, which had received some rude cultivation in the Indian maize-fields, and required little preparation for the plow.

What was called Breuckelen was not the locality of their first settlements. The first grant of land, in what was afterwards the city limits of Brooklyn, appears to have been

First
grants

Ƨbc
Waal-
boght

to William Adriaense Bennett and Jacques Bentyn, who in 1636 purchased from the Indian sachem *Ka* a considerable tract at Gowanus, on which a house was erected, only to be destroyed in the Indian wars of 1643.² Long afterwards the fame of Gowanus oysters and wild turkeys was carried home to Holland. The Labadist travellers who came there in 1679 said of these oysters that "they are large and full, some of them not less than a foot long."³ The shells were burned for lime. The supply of oysters remained abundant enough afterwards for great quantities to be pickled and exported to Barbadoes.

Where the East River made an abrupt bend to the north, leaving a wide shallow cove on the Long Island shore, the Dutch soon noticed good land sloping gradually down into the meadows surrounding the water. This was called the *Waal-boght*, and is the present site of the Navy Yard. Two derivations of this name are advanced. It was thought to have been thus styled to mean the Bay of the Walloons, since afterwards many French families settled there, and it was then known as the Walloon quarter.⁴ The term *Waal*, however, means a basin or inner harbor, and *boght* a bend. Hence the word may have signified "the bend of the inner harbor," like a similar place called *Waal-boght* in the city of Amsterdam.⁵ This name was sometimes abridged as

Waal, or the Wale. On the faith of old family traditions, it was long and confidently asserted that on the shores of this bay was born the first child of Dutch settlers on Long Island. This claim of priority for the Waal-boght settlement is not established.

Joris Jansen de Rapalje, a Huguenot who had married Catelyna Trico of Paris, and had resided at Fort Orange and later had an inn at New Amsterdam, eventually came to live in a farm on the Waal-boght. The purchase was made on June 16, 1637.⁶ It was their eldest daughter Sarah who was erroneously claimed to have been born on Long Island before 1630. After the English conquest, Catelyna's husband died, and she lived on at the Waal-boght—the mother of Brooklyn—affectionately absorbed in her eleven children and their descendants, who in 1679 already numbered one hundred and forty-five. A visitor, who then saw her, described her as devoted with her whole soul to her progeny. "Nevertheless she lived alone by herself, a little apart from the others, having her little garden and other conveniences which she took care of herself."⁷ Her house was probably near the present site of the United States Marine Hospital. When Governor Dongan wished to establish, as a fact, that the earliest settlements in the direction of the Delaware were Dutch, he had recourse to the evidence of this venerable dame.

The
Rapalje
Family

The
Ferry

In 1684, she was summoned before his Excellency, and was apparently still vivacious, as she gave her deposition. Describing her arrival here in 1623, she delighted to relate that: "Fouer women came along with her in the same shipp, in which the Governor Arian Jarissen came also over, which fouer women were married at sea,"⁸ and afterwards with their husbands were sent to the Delaware.

In 1688, she made another affidavit at her house "in ye Wale." Recalling the bitter struggle with Indians on Long Island and Manhattan, she pleasantly alluded to her previous life with them, for three years at Fort Orange, "all of which time ye s^d Indians were all quiet as Lambs & came & traded with all ye freedom imaginable."⁹

About 1642, the public ferry was established between Manhattan and Long Island. The landing-places were at Peck's Slip in Manhattan, and at the present foot of Fulton Street on Long Island. A collection of houses soon gathered about the Long Island landing, which little settlement became known as "The Ferry." Southward from the Ferry and along the present Heights and East River shore extended the farms of Claes Cornelissen van Schouw, Jan Manje, Andries Hudde, Jacob Wolphertsen, Frederic Lubbertsen¹⁰; and ex-Governor Van Twiller had himself taken a grant of Roode-Hoek, so called from its rich

red soil.¹¹ It is difficult now to retrace this line of the water-front, so greatly has the filling-in of Atlantic Docks changed the contour of the shore. Red Hook appears to have contained about fifty acres, raised up somewhat above the surrounding meadows. This small promontory projected out to the westward, and to the north of it the shore-line receded inland in marshes towards Gowanus. On some of these farm grants there were slight improvements; others were long allowed to remain uncultivated.

The Indian wars of 1643, begun on Manhattan, also extended to Long Island. The white settlers appear to have been the aggressors. The retaliation of the red tribes devastated many of the bouweries. In the end, the Indians were driven from their maize-fields, which left attractive sites for habitation, where the new settlers founded a small compact hamlet instead of occupying disconnected farms.

Following the main road (now Fulton Street) from the Ferry about a mile, the settlers took up the lands between the Waal-boght and Gowanus Kill, in the vicinity of what are now Fulton, Hoyt, and Smith Streets. The best parts of this new territory were taken up by Jan Evertsen Bout, Huyck Aertsen, Jacob Stoffelsen, Pieter Cornelissen, and Joris Dircksen.¹² In 1645, the West India Company had recom-

The
First
Schepens

mended that the colonists should establish themselves "in towns, villages, and hamlets, as the English are in the habit of doing." These settlers gladly availed themselves of this advice, and notified the Colonial Council that they desired to "found a town at their own expense." This they called Breuckelen, after the ancient village of that name on the Vecht, in the province of Utrecht.

The Governor and Council responded promptly and confirmed their proceedings in June, 1646. No municipal or local liberties were, however, conferred as in New England. The first government grant to this town was merely a ratification of the election of Schepens, and declaration of their authority, as follows:

"We, William Kieft, Director General, and the Council residing in New Netherland, on behalf of the High and Mighty Lords States-General of the United Netherlands, His Highness of Orange, and the Honorable Directors of the General Incorporated West India Company, To all those who shall see these presents or hear them read, Greeting:

"Whereas, Jan Evertsen Bout and Huyck Aertsen from Rossum were on the 21st May last unanimously chosen by those interested of Breuckelen, situate on Long Island, as Schepens, to decide all questions which may arise, as they shall deem proper, according to the Exemptions of New Netherland granted to particular Colonies, which election is subscribed by them, with express stipulation that if any one refuse to submit in the premises aforesaid to the above-mentioned Jan Evertsen and Huyck Aertsen, he shall forfeit the right he claims to land in the allotment of Breuckelen, and in order that everything may be done with more authority,

Breuckelen

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We, the Director and Council aforesaid, have therefore authorized and appointed, and do hereby authorize the said Jan Evertsen and Huyck Aertsen to be schepens of Breuckelen ; and in case Jan Evertsen and Huyck Aertsen do hereafter find the labor too onerous, they shall be at liberty to select two more from among the inhabitants of Breuckelen to adjoin them to themselves. We charge and command every inhabitant of Breuckelen to acknowledge and respect the above-mentioned Jan Evertsen and Huyck Aertsen as their schepens, and if any one shall be found to exhibit contumaciousness towards them, he shall forfeit his share as above stated. This done in Council in Fort Amsterdam in New Netherland." ¹³

Early
Settlers

Later, on December 1, the authorities gave Breuckelen a schout or constable, and Jan Teunissen was thus appointed, who had been already acting as such for some months before his formal commission.

The origin of these settlers has not been definitely traced to the village of Breuckelen, or to within the jurisdiction of the city of Utrecht. The French wars there, and the Revolutionary war here, have despoiled both Breuckelens of their earliest records. The nomenclature of the little towns on Long Island, however, cannot be regarded as accidental. The association of the names of three hamlets into a triangle, generally similar to the position of the same names in Holland, is a clear proof of the attachment of the colonists to their natal district, between Utrecht and the Zuider Zee. Similar associations appeared

Old
Breuckelen

at the same time in the new villages to the east of Breuckelen and on the Sound. From the province of Zealand the wish was shown to perpetuate home towns in the names of Vlissingen (Flushing) and Middelburg (Newtown). The identity of village names, and similarity of the relative sites in the neighborhood of Breuckelen to those in the fatherland, are illustrated by two maps from new and old Netherlands.



Amersfoort, Breuckelen, and Utrecht have many historic associations. To the politician and reader of Motley, they are forever linked with the career and tragic end of Barneveld. In 1619, he fell a martyr to the cause of state rights and local self-government. Such an event, comparatively recent in 1646, and still appealing to the sense of individual liberty,

may have been recalled by the settlers in America. While the liberties of Utrecht had been the cherished objects of Barneveld's solicitude, he proudly claimed his birth in Amersfoort.¹⁴ In moments of arduous public labor he looked hopefully forward to an honorable and calm retirement from the tumults of party strife to his beautiful estate at Guntersteijn in the village of Breuckelen.¹⁵ Breuckelen, however, was an ancient village three centuries before

Old
Breucke-
len



the settlement in New Netherlands. Located between Utrecht and Amsterdam, it was early noted for its healthfulness, which soon made it a desirable residence region. The surrounding fields and foliage are strikingly green and luxuriant, even for Holland. Castles grew up about it along the banks of the beautiful Vecht, which all the successive tides of war have not quite destroyed.

Old
Breucke-
len

In the Dutch records, Breuckelen had various spellings, as Broklede, Broicklede, Brackola, Brocklandia, and Broeckland. Hence some say that the name came from its brooks and marshes—*van de drassige en broekactige veenlanden*—meaning a brook or marsh land.¹⁶ It is mentioned as an important place in the year 1317. There were two parishes on opposite sides of the Vecht. These are Breuckelen-Nijenrode, from the castle of Nijenrode, and Breuckelen-St. Pieters. The small river Vecht dividing these towns may be considered an outlet of the Rhine, which parts in two channels at Utrecht. The Vecht turns to the north and empties into the Zuider Zee. It is navigable for small vessels, and at Breuckelen is a little over two hundred feet wide.

The old country-seats along the Vecht, once set in the prim, geometric gardens of the last century, are now represented by modern villas, half hidden by trees, which to-day form bits of unmatched rural scenery. Eminent landscape painters of the modern Dutch school have loved to make studies amid these gentle windings, and the celebrity of the Vecht in art bids fair to surpass the forgotten fame of the neighboring castles. Old draw-bridges of wood cross the sluggish river. Trees come close to the tow-path, bordered by quaint gardens. Along the garden edges, looking out upon the stream, are *Koepels* or

tea-houses, and over all this abundant foliage rises a church spire.

From the fifteenth century the village had a coat of arms. The crown imports a royal grant, but from whom and whence is not known.



SEAL OF BREUCKELEN

The castles of Nijenrode and Oud-aa are admittedly ancient. Indeed, what is now Breuckelen-Nijenrode was once a fief of the lords of Nijenrode.

The settlers on Long Island generally reproduced in wood with thatched roofs the more solid stone cottages of the fatherland. They were mostly of one story, with a garret above. Their fireplaces and chimneys were stone to the height of about six feet, with great ovens alongside. Above the stone they carried up the chimneys with wood plastered thick with mortar inside.¹⁷ But few stone houses were built before the English conquest. Travellers visiting such homes were cheered with good fires, which they noted were of clear oak and hickory, of which there

Old
Breucke-
len

Plantations

was no scruple to burn with lavish hospitality. The openings of the huge fireplaces were often large enough to seat the family on both sides of the fire, without jambs. A dwelling, sometimes with the barn also, was encircled with strong palisades as a defense against Indians. An institution in the better houses was the *betste*, which was a closed-in bedstead, built into the house like a cupboard, having doors, which shut up the low bunk in the daytime. Other houses had a simple *slaap-banck*, or sleeping-bench, in the room, on which a great feather bed lay in state.

The plantation and farms about Breuckelen, besides their ordinary farm produce, cultivated great fields of tobacco. Some of the best exported from the American colonies grew on the plantations about the Waal-boght. Later, it is recorded that cotton was successfully raised in Breuckelen, although only for home use, to be woven with native wool.¹⁸

Upon the arrival of Governor Stuyvesant in New Netherlands in 1647, he was obliged to allow an election to be had, so that there should be popular representation in the Council. New Amsterdam, Breuckelen, Amersfoort, Midwout (Flatbush), and other places, elected eighteen of the "most notable, reasonable, honest, and respectable" among them, from whom the Governor chose nine, as an Advisory Council. In this body Breuckelen was

represented by its founder and schepen, Jan Evertsen Bout. In the subsequent dissatisfaction with the authority assumed by the Governor in 1653, and the public conventions and remonstrances, Breuckelen took prominent part, being represented by Frederic Lubbertsen, Paulen van der Beeck, and William Beekman, whose maintenance of the rights of the people specially irritated the jealous Governor. Breuckelen, Amersfoort, and Midwout were specially ordered to prohibit their residents from attending any meeting at New Amsterdam.

After peace had been declared between England and Holland in 1654, enlarged local powers were granted, and two new schepens given to Breuckelen. A like increase was conferred on the magistracies of Amersfoort and Midwout, and a superior district court for the three villages was established. This conferred important political privileges. It gave the people rights of local jurisdiction and that right of representation for which they had contended in 1653.¹⁹

A citizen of Breuckelen could not refuse to continue to hold public office. In 1654, Jan Evertsen Bout declined to act as schepen. He incautiously said he would rather go back to Holland than continue to perform such burdensome duties. No excuses regarding his private business were accepted. Though the schepen-

The first
Church

elect had served for previous terms, and filled other colonial offices, he was not now allowed to retire. The sheriff was formally ordered to notify him of these summary commands of Governor Stuyvesant: "If you will not accept to serve as schepen for the welfare of the Village of Breuckelen with others, your fellow-residents, then you must prepare yourself to sail in the ship *King Solomon*, for Holland, agreeably to your utterance." ²⁰ This appeal to the civic conscience of one who had been prominent as a reformer, coupled with the grim threat of deportation, was irresistible. No further declinations in Breuckelen offices seem to have troubled the Council.

The first church in the present territory was started at Midwout (Flatbush), the building of which was begun in 1654. Before the people of Breuckelen would promise to contribute to the support of the domine, they solicited "with reverence" that the Rev. Mr. Polhemus might be allowed to preach in Breuckelen and Midwout alternately. The Council cautiously assented, declaring they had no objection that the Reverend Polhemus, "when the weather permits shall preach alternately at both places." ²¹

This met serious objection from the people of Amersfoort and Gravesend, who pointed out that "as Breuckelen is quite two hours' walking from Amersfoort and Gravesend, it

was impossible for them to attend church in the morning, and return home at noon. So they consider it a hardship to choose, to hear the Gospel but once a day, or to be compelled to travel four hours in going and returning *all for one single sermon*—which would be to some very troublesome, and to some utterly impossible.”²² The Council finally settled the difficulty by directing that the morning sermon be at Midwout, and that instead of the customary afternoon service, an evening discourse be preached alternately at Midwout and Breuckelen. It was not till 1660, that Breuckelen had a church and domine of its own, the Rev. Henricus Selyns, who was of a distinguished Amsterdam family. He labored successfully for four years, then returned to Holland; came out again eighteen years later, was enthusiastically welcomed, and settled in New York. His Latin poem eulogistic of Cotton Mather’s great work is printed in later editions of the *Magnalia*.²³

After the settled pastor, came the schoolmaster. He, too, was a learned and distinguished man—Carel de Beauvois, an educated French Protestant from Leyden, who was appointed in Breuckelen in 1661, and was also required to perform the offices of court messenger, precentor (*voorsanger*), “ring the bell, and do whatever else is required.”

In 1660, Breuckelen numbered thirty-one

British
Conquest

families amounting to one hundred and thirty-four persons. It may be doubted if any hamlet of its size in the entire American colonies was favored with better spiritual guides, or more learned and helpful teachers—a preeminence in school and in pulpit that Brooklynites may well endeavor to keep. Thereafter the growth of the village was steady and uneventful. English settlers came into the neighboring towns of Gravesend, Jamaica, and Flushing, but not without friction with their Dutch neighbors.

On a morning of August, 1664, a British fleet, unannounced, anchored in Gravesend Bay. Staten Island was first seized. A body of New England volunteers came through the Sound, landed on Long Island, and encamped near the Ferry. Governor Stuyvesant indignantly declined to yield. A part of the fleet came up the East River and landed more troops below Breuckelen. Governor Stuyvesant's historic "I would rather be carried out dead" than surrender, was at last overborne by the entreaties of the women and children. On September 8, 1664, Governor Nicolls raised the flag of England on the Fort, and named New Amsterdam, New York. Long Island and Staten Island, and probably Westchester, were made an English "shire." After passing through various phases of Dutch spelling, Breuckelen became Brockland, Brock-

Breuckelen

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lin, Brookline, and at last Brooklyn, in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

In 1683, when the counties of Kings and Queens were established, the settlement of Newtown was detached from the West Riding and made part of Queens County, leaving Kings County with its present territory. In 1816, Brooklyn became an incorporated village, which grew to the dignity of a city in 1834. Williamsburg was united with Brooklyn in 1855, followed by the absorption of the towns of Kings County in 1886 and 1894. In the consolidation with New York in 1897 this enlarged municipality, embracing all the county of Kings, has now become the Borough of Brooklyn.

From Village to Borough.

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 " Tu dilecte Deo, cujus Bostonia gaudet
 Nostra Ministerio, seu cui tot scribere libros,

Non opus, aut labor est qui Magnalia Christi
Americana refers scriptura plurima. Nonne
Dignus es agnoscere inter Magnalia Christi?
Vive Liber totique Orbi Miracula Monstres
Quae sunt extra Orbem. *Cottone*, in saecula vive;
Et dum Mundus erit vivat tua Fama per Orbem."

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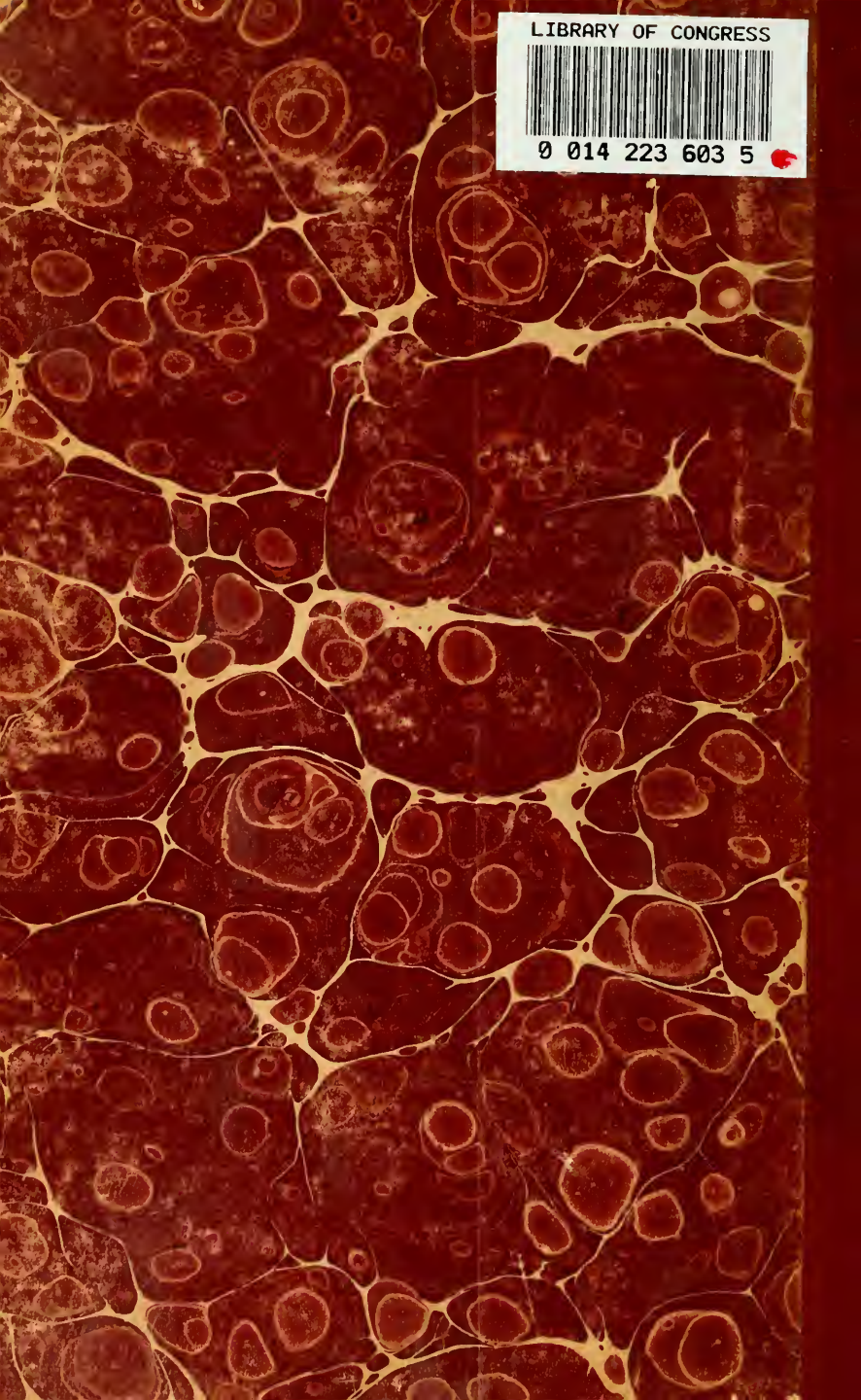
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